

## 4.2 Aesthetics/Visual Quality

### 4.2.1 Existing Conditions

#### 4.2.1.1 *Visual Character*

The irregular-shaped project site is bordered by agricultural land on the north, the Dogwood and Central Main Canals on the south and west, and State Route 111 (SR-111) on the east. A vacant lot and storage yard for semi-truck trailers is located south of the canal. The canal is located at a slightly higher elevation than the adjacent agricultural lands in order to provide a proper gravity gradient to irrigate the surrounding agricultural fields. A geothermal electrical generating facility, which contains production wells, is located approximately one-half mile northwest of the project site.

The project site is located at sea level elevation and the surface topography is essentially flat, as is most of the Imperial Valley region. The project site has been used historically for agriculture but is currently fallow, undeveloped and vacant. Small patches of native (arrow-weed scrub and disturbed cismontane alkali marsh) and non-native (tamarisk scrub and ruderal) vegetation are located along the project perimeter, especially along the Dogwood and Central Main Canals.

Existing views onto the project site are available from the surrounding area, specifically from the main intersection of Jasper Road and SR-111 at the northeast corner of the project site. According to the Previous EIR, there are no specific scenic resources or unique features throughout or near the City limits; however, the City of Calexico has unobstructed open views of agricultural fields (City of Calexico, 2001).

#### 4.2.1.2 *Light and Glare*

Based on the Previous EIR, existing lighting surrounding the proposed project site is typical of areas dominated by agricultural activities (City of Calexico, 2001). The project site is bordered by Jasper Road on the north and SR-111 on the east. These roadways, especially SR-111, generate glare both during the night hours, when cars travel with lights on, and during daytime hours because of the sun's reflection from cars and pavement surfaces. Due to the nature of the existing land uses, there is little light generated from street lighting. Most of the light and glare that currently exists within the project area is a result of motor vehicle traffic along SR-111 and commercial development southeast of the project site. The geothermal electrical generating facility, located northwest of the site, is also lit at night.

#### 4.2.1.3 *Existing Regulations*

##### **A. City of Calexico General Plan**

The 2007 City of Calexico General Plan Update and Final Environmental Impact Report (City of Calexico, 2007) provides a blueprint for future growth and development in the City of Calexico. The General Plan does not identify any specific view corridors within the City of Calexico; however, one policy in the Conservation/Open Space Element of the General Plan is specific to aesthetics/visual quality.

**Policy 4c:** Encourage high-quality architectural and landscaping designs that complement the city's visual character.

#### **B. City of Calexico Municipal Code**

The Zoning Ordinance (Chapter 17) of the City of Calexico Municipal Code provides design review and light/glare requirements for new development. Large new development is subject to Architectural Review by the Design Review Committee to ensure it would be harmonious with the surrounding area. Architectural Review includes review of exterior design, materials, textures, and colors. The lighting regulations in the Zoning Ordinance require light sources in commercial development "be shielded in such a manner that no light is visible from streets or adjoining properties." In addition, all exterior lighting is required to be low-pressure sodium. In order to address this architectural review, the individual buildings will be required to obtain approval through a Development and Site Plan Review Process by the City of Calexico.

The City of Calexico Zoning Ordinance do not identify any specific view corridors or design policies that directly address bulk, scale, height, mass, or other related architectural features.

#### **C. Imperial County General Plan**

##### ***Circulation and Scenic Highways Element***

The County of Imperial has established a Circulation and Scenic Highway Element in the General Plan (Imperial County, ~~1993~~revised 2008) to identify the future transportation needs of local residents and business. The inclusion of Scenic Highways provides a means of protecting and enhancing scenic resources within highway corridors in Imperial County.

There are no designated scenic highways surrounding the project area nor is the project area visible from any scenic highway. The portion of SR-111 from Bombay Beach on the northeast shore of the Salton Sea, to the Imperial/Riverside County line to the north is eligible for designation as a state scenic highway. However, the proposed project is located over 90 miles south of this portion of SR-111.

##### ***Conservation and Open Space Element***

The Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan identifies plans and measures for the preservation and management of biological and cultural resources, soils, minerals, energy, regional aesthetics, air quality, and open space. The Conservation and Open Space Element identifies one goal and one objective for the preservation of regional visual resources.

Goal 7: The aesthetic character of the region shall be protected and enhanced to provide a pleasing environment for residential, commercial, recreational, and tourist activity.

Objective 7.1: Encourage the preservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the desert and mountain landscape.

## 4.2.2 Impact Thresholds

For purposes of this EIR, a significant Aesthetics/Visual Quality impact would occur if implementation of the proposed project would:

- *Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;*
- *Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;*
- *Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; and/or,*
- *Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.*

## 4.2.3 Impact Analysis

The proposed project would be visible from the surrounding area, specifically from the main intersection of Jasper Road and SR-111 at the northeast corner of the project site. The proposed project would not block or obstruct views from the surrounding area as no significant views are provided from the site or surrounding area.

### 4.2.3.1 Scenic Vista

The project site is not located in a scenic vista, nor does the City of Calexico General Plan designate the project site as an important visual resource (City of Calexico, 2007). None of the roadways abutting the project site are designated or proposed scenic. Therefore, development of the project site with the proposed project would not impact a scenic vista or resource. No impact to this issue area is anticipated.

### 4.2.3.2 Scenic Resources and State Scenic Highway

There are no historic structures or significant scenic resources, including trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings, existing on the project site. In addition, there are no designated scenic highways surrounding the project site nor is the project site visible from any scenic highway or designated public vantage point. Therefore, the proposed project would not damage a scenic resource within a state scenic highway. No impact to this issue area is anticipated.

### 4.2.3.3 Visual Character or Quality

Currently, the proposed project site is vacant. Construction of the proposed project would alter the existing visual character of the area and its surroundings as a result of converting vacant fallow agricultural land to commercial highway uses and a casino resort complex/hotel. The project area is relatively flat and as such, substantial site grading and landform change would not be required for project development. The project area would be visually disrupted in the short-term during construction activities. Because substantial grading is not required and construction activities would be temporary, the visual character of the site would not be substantially degraded in the short-term.

The proposed construction would occur in five phases, which could span over 10 to 15 years. Long-term impacts to visual character and quality would not be substantial because the proposed Specific Plan includes design and landscaping guidelines to provide a visually attractive and well landscaped project. Individual elements of the project would require Design Review approval by the City of Calexico, ensuring implementation of the Specific Plan design and landscaping guidelines. The design aspects include overall theme, architectural treatments, landscaping, lighting, and setbacks. Therefore, the proposed project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and its surroundings. Additionally, the proposed project would contribute toward implementation of the abovementioned objectives, goals, and policies of the City of Calexico and Imperial County General Plans as well as meet the development design review and lighting standards of the City of Calexico Municipal Code. This issue is considered less than significant.

#### **4.2.3.4      *Light and Glare***

The project site is vacant and as such is not currently a source of light or glare. The proposed project has the potential to create a new source of substantial light or glare during the day or nighttime.

##### **A.      Vehicle Headlights**

The proposed roadways are not concealed from surrounding land uses. As such, there would be additional light upon the surrounding land uses caused by an increased number of automobile headlights to the area. However, adjacent land uses are either agricultural or commercial; therefore, increased light and glare caused by increased nighttime travel would not significantly affect adjacent land uses. This issue is considered less than significant.

##### **B.      Street and Parking Lot Lighting**

Lighting provided by the commercial highway uses, casino, resort complex/hotel, and parking areas may impact the surrounding land uses, depending on the type, size and location of the proposed lighting. Street lighting would increase along Jasper Road and SR-111. Additional lighting would be introduced to the area on the proposed Scaroni Road extension and Sunset Boulevard. Streetlights would be placed on both sides of the street, directly opposite one another, rather than the more common staggered positioning. The parking lots would contain numerous light fixtures for visibility and security. Indirect lighting of building exteriors would be accomplished in a manner that casts light in an upward direction, washing the building walls in light. However, shielding devices or other light pollution limiting mechanisms would be utilized to reduce light pollution impacts on the surrounding area. In addition, the final lighting plan for the proposed project will be reviewed by the City for compliance with the City's Municipal Code. Therefore, the potential for light from proposed streets and parking lots will not impact the existing and future surrounding land uses. This issue is considered less than significant.

##### **C.      Glare**

Proposed buildings have the potential to create a new source of glare depending on the type of building materials used and the number, size, and location of windows on the buildings. The proposed project would not use materials such as fiberglass, aluminum or vinyl/plastic siding, galvanized products, and brightly painted steel roofs, which have the potential to create on- and off-site glare. In addition, the

proposed project would require Design Review approval by the City of Calexico to ensure materials would not increase glare. Therefore, future development on the project site is not anticipated to create a significant amount of on- or off-site glare. This issue is considered less than significant.

#### 4.2.4 Significance of Impact

Based on the analysis provided above, the proposed project would not have a substantial effect on a scenic vista; substantially damage scenic resources and degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and the surroundings; or create a new source of substantial light or glare. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not result in a significant aesthetics/visual quality impact.

#### 4.2.5 Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are proposed as no significant short-term or long-term aesthetic/visual quality impact has been identified.

#### 4.2.6 Conclusion

Implementation of the proposed project would not result in a significant aesthetic/visual quality impact and no mitigation is required.

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